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Letter dated 7 May 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Government of my country, I have the honour to transmit to you a summary of the preliminary, severe damage sustained by the tourism sector as a result of the current crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The current crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic has had a negative impact on development in the country and on the various vital sectors of its economy, including tourism, which represents an important source of income for a significant percentage of the Syrian population and a large number of public and private institutions. This important sector has not escaped the systematic campaign that aims to destroy infrastructure and hurt various vital economic sectors, either through the attacks and acts of destruction that are carried out by the armed terrorist groups which are supported and funded by foreign parties, or through the unilateral economic and trade measures that are being imposed by certain States independently of the framework of international legitimacy. Those measures are accompanied by a tendentious media campaign that is distorting the truth about Syria.

Even before the crisis began, initiatives targeting the tourism sector in Syria were launched, and various well-known sites that provide tourists with advice and information and secure reservations for them began to issue warnings, for which there was no basis, against travelling to or staying in Syria. As a result, reservations have fallen since March 2011. That campaign was carried out in tandem with political pressures that were brought to bear on European tourists, who were advised to leave Syria forthwith. That has led to a fall in hotel occupancy from an average of 90 per cent before events began to under 15 per cent. Furthermore, several States Member Governments and regional entities have taken unjust decisions, pursuant to which their airline companies are forbidden to provide flight services to Syria and cooperation with Syrian airline companies has been halted, thus reducing the

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number of tourist and other travellers to Syria and causing considerable additional losses to several sectors, including that of tourism.

The tourism sector is also subjected to systematic terrorism by certain armed terrorist groups which target transport and communication routes and transport companies, in addition to terrorizing, killing and abducting civilians. As a result, hotel occupancy rates have fallen to less than 10 per cent, even in the two main cities of Damascus and Aleppo. In the cities and areas where there is tension, the impact of the crisis on the tourism sector has been totally disastrous: tourism activity has come to a complete halt and hotels have ceased to operate. All restaurants, roadside rest-stops, fairgrounds and other leisure facilities have also had to close. All workers in the tourism sector and tourism-related companies and offices have been equally badly affected. Some 40 per cent of all those employed in the tourism sector in Syria are estimated to have lost their jobs completely or to have had their hours reduced. They are forced either to remain unemployed or to work for half their former wages. Travel and tourism offices and companies have also sustained heavy losses that have forced them to cease operations or reduce staffing levels. The sole exception is the tiny proportion of those who operate in the Syrian tourism sector abroad. Tourist guides and manual labourers and others who work in the heritage tourism sector have also sustained heavy losses and many have lost their livelihoods. Most were owners of small or microenterprises. Such persons have unquestionably lost their work because of the crisis, and those serious losses have both economic and social dimensions. Public transport companies have also been heavily affected by the continual attacks on their cars and buses by armed terrorist groups: the overland transportation of goods and passengers has fallen by more than 50 per cent, with consequently substantial losses.

It should be noted here that there are thousands of people who own small buses who have become totally crippled financially. Most bought their buses with a view to using them for tourism, taking out mortgages from private banks. The majority of those persons, all of whom own small or microenterprises, have been forced into bankruptcy and have had their buses auctioned off by the banks in order to meet the debts that they were unable to repay.

Against that background, the Syrian Arab Republic underlines that the international family must exert greater efforts to end the scourge of terrorism that is destroying the dreams of every Syrian and depriving them of their right to security, stability and development. Syria also stresses the importance of bringing pressure to bear on all the States and regional entities which are supporting that terrorism, and imposing a policy of collective punishment that targets the means of survival of the peoples of the developing world, to end their violations forthwith: those violations collectively constitute a blatant infringement of international instruments and norms, an assault on good relations between States, and a violation of human rights principles and the relevant United Nations resolutions. In this context, Syria further stresses the provisions of numerous tourism-related international instruments, including the Manila Declaration on World Tourism, the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development and Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, and the plan of action for implementation of the outcomes of the world summit on sustainable development that is known as the Johannesburg Implementation Plan, all of which recognize the role of tourism in the development of the peoples of the world and, in particular, of those of developing countries, and encourage international cooperation with regard to tourism,

requesting all States to remove all obstacles or restrictions and other measures that reduce the important role in development of this vital sector.

It would be appreciated if the present letter were circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 17 (a) and 19 and as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative